

Television, News Media and Mind Control

In March 1969 at the age of 15 I began working in Fleet Street for an Australian news company. I was an office boy. I ran errands for the journalists, I answered the telephone switchboard, I made the coffee, I kept the files of newspaper back issues. Working as a teenage office boy I grew my hair long, read International Times (the most widely read paper of the “Freak Scene” or “Alternative Society” in those days). I developed a distrust of the media in general.

I'd read Orwell's “1984” and I saw the parallels of it in the real world. We were being told what to think and who to hate. A counter-culture movement was telling us to question everything.

There was a revolution going on and it seemed to have no beginning or end. Men were now able to grow their hair long and women were now permitted to wear trousers. These were great important breakthroughs. Teachers, police officers, doctors, lawyers, priests, scientists and politicians were not to be trusted. By absurd contrast “mystics” were getting an exaggerated amount of trust.

The word “radical” was considered a good word in those days. Critics praised radical art, radical cinema, radical literature, radical science and technology, radical lifestyle concepts. “Radical” meant shaking things up, breaking away from the old traditions which had caused all the misery in the world. “Tradition” meant misogyny, homophobia, dogma, cruelty, slavery, narrowness, repression, ritual, conformism and the class structure.

It was generally taken as common knowledge that the older generation wanted to impose their narrow minded traditions upon us and radical new directions in everything we could think of was the answer. It was a time of experimentation.

The news media haven't changed very much since then but the way the word “radical” is being pressed into service now is pretty much the opposite of its normal meaning. How can a retreat into ancient traditional religion be radical? Only in the sense of causing a sudden unexpected change for people who've grown used to some aspects of freedom which were won for us by the earlier form of “radical”.

It was clear in George Orwell's time that news propaganda attempts to control what people are able to think. Control the words, control the mind, control public opinion. Benjamin Franklin wrote “This sacred Privilege is so essential to free Governments, that the Security of Property, and the Freedom of Speech always go together; and in those wretched Countries where a Man cannot call his Tongue his own, he can scarce call any Thing else his own. Whoever would overthrow the Liberty of a Nation, must begin by subduing the Freeness of Speech”.

Subduing the freedom of speech and thought is attempted in various ways. One way is by forbidding comparisons. Benjamin Netanyahu's government in Israel attempted to make the whole world agree that comparing the actions of his government to those of the Nazis was inherently an anti-Semitic thing to do. But comparison is the most necessary building block of thought. If we are forbidden to compare one thing with another then we are prevented from forming opinions. Think about how to think. If you had never thought before how would you begin to be a thinking person?

You would have to compare something with something.
Just as molecules are made of atoms, opinions are built up from comparisons.

Benjamin Netanyahu's Israeli government isn't like the Nazis. It really isn't. However, I am only able to make this statement by comparing the two with each other and seeing how many differences and how many similarities there are. After making this comparison I am able to state that the two are different to each other in significant ways. Netanyahu's government should be drawing people's attention to the differences instead of attempting to prevent people from making any comparison. Suppression of rational thought is not the way to go.

Another way in which news media and governments attempt to control opinion is by packaging news into repeatable units of news product. So the terrorist attack upon the World Trade Centre on 11-09-2001 was packaged forever with the handy Madison Avenue style brand name of "9-11", pronounced "nine-eleven" but linking subconsciously to the American emergency phone number nine-one-one. And so it is with all of the media presentation. Tragedies in the lives of real human people are packaged as a product. Words are constructed in ways which permit each piece of news to be handled like a chunk of factoids and thrown around containing assumptions and pre-judgements.

These chunks, packages, units of pre-judged content are like the measurements in Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise. Achilles, the fast runner in ancient Greece, can never catch up with the tortoise because the mathematicians have theorised him to be running in discrete packets of space, units of catch-up, chunks of progress. Since he is only able to move in these pre-determined units Achilles must cover half the distance and then half the distance and then half of the remaining distance and half of the then remaining distance etc. etc. etc. but never actually pass the tortoise to win the race.

We are Achilles. So long as we are still moving in pre-judged packages of news from the usual media sources we can never think in real raw information from the true world situation. We never catch that sporty racing tortoise of truth. If we try to step outside of the established packages of ersatz truth we are treated as someone who isn't playing the game right..... and they go to the sport.

Sport is another important bit of the control of thought. Sport encourages people to always think in binary opposition terms.

"Pick a side",

"Choose one team or the other",

"Allow yourself to be polarised according to Big Brother's current alignment".

So, by following faithfully the packages of news item we are able to take part in Big Brother's "Two minutes of Hate" (or two minutes of whichever emotion they wish us to feel) and we

remain within acceptable conformist parameters, disagreeing with each other only within acceptable forms of permitted disagreement.

I have long championed the causes of ignorance and uselessness which enable malcontents like me to remain outside Big Brother's system. If I'm useless you can't USE me. If I'm ignorant I can see that the Emperor's new clothes are nothing but nothing.

My teenage role model when I was 14 in 1967 was Patrick McGoochan's character of The Prisoner/Number Six.

During most of the 1970s and 1980s I avoided ever reading newspapers, watching television or in any way keeping up with the news. My justification for this was that I had seen the extent of distortion, false reporting and absolute fiction I had seen in these media. The casualness of propaganda. The willingness of their readers, listeners and viewers to believe whatever they were told to believe.

Ironically, during these years, I was hypnotised and brainwashed by a pseudo-religious cult which functioned in a very similar way to television and news media and saw to it that I was still getting my behaviour control and attitude adjustment by a different route. The system has a few alternative ways of dealing with the really difficult cases. Nevertheless, my wilful ignorance and uselessness combined with my dislike for money and my determination to analyse everything in the whole world until I found the truth meant that, eventually, after six and a half years, I got away from "The Emin" as they called themselves and learned a lot of interesting stuff in the process.

There were downsides to my anti-television, anti-newspaper attitude. I was unaware of the existence of something called "punk" until it was pretty much over. I hadn't seen whichever television programme was the hot topic of discussion in the workplace each day. I didn't know who was fighting whom or what their alleged reasons were.

There were upsides too. I read a wider range and a greater number of books than most other people and I tended to read them properly, rather than skimming. In the 1990s I gradually began to read and watch and listen to reporting again but without ever trusting any statement which wasn't cross-checkable.

In 1995 I got onto the internet for the first time and saw, ongoing from then to the present day, the massive proliferation of both facts and lies.

I trust that the vast majority of human beings are neither saints nor evil. I trust that people are mostly untrustworthy but that they are mostly motivated by understandable needs like food and water and medicine and caring for dependents or, in general terms, the desire for a life which isn't too horrible. I trust that the untrustworthiness of people is because of frailty of perception, the tendency to put their trust in dodgy news sources, the tendency to be easily led, easily recruited to "picking a side" instead of seeing both sides, the tendency to be scared or enraged and to lose hold of objectivity. I trust that the untrustworthiness of people is also because of basic competitive instincts which are easily manipulated by sport and news media into cinematic scenarios of winning and losing and the ever present cycle of abuse which we find in the "justified" revenge narratives.